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ABSTRACT

The principal aims of the Tipton Childminding Project, begun in 1994, were to increase access to and quality of training and support for childminders and caregivers in England's Tipton Challenge area, to increase the number of childminders and child caregivers from all sections of the community, to promote interagency initiatives to develop links between childminding and other forms of childcare provision, and to demonstrate the value of different forms of childminding support in raising the quality of childminding. This report documents the work of that project from 1994 to 1998, detailing the project's development and chronological history. Among the conclusions of the report are that: (1) there is a need for continued support, advice, and guidance for partnership agencies to enable sustainable collaboration; (2) training for childminders was found to be very effective and was delivered monthly by the Social Services Department and the Tipton Childminding Project by 1995; and (3) the Project had become one of the largest providers of independent daycare training and post-registration childminding training. Recommendations are delineated with regard to childminder requirements, the need for childminder support, the need for increased public awareness, and the need for specific and regular training for childminders. Included in the report are case studies and reports presenting a social services department perspective, describing the involvement of the Youth Forum and the Save the Children, and detailing the project's achievements. Also included are samples of leaflets used in the project. Two appendices include a questionnaire used to identify childminders' needs. (KB)

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mingling

– your own business

by Lakhvir Rellon

Karen Wyatt

A partnership initiative between
Save the Children
Shanwal Welfare Society Rawalpindi Pakistan
and Tipton City Partnership

TIPTON CHALLENGE
Partnership

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Save the Children

minding – your own business

by Lakhvir Rellon

A partnership initiative between Save the Children, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and Tipton City Challenge

An evaluation of the Tipton Childminding Project

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Foreword

The availability of accessible and high quality services for children in their early years plays an important part in their development and also in parents' ability to undertake work or training. Training in childminding is often a first step for women into other forms of childcare work but is fundamentally important in its own right.

The Tipton Childminding Project has made a major contribution to the quality and profile of childminding services, not only within the Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell but throughout the UK. An opportunity to draw on the expertise developed by the Project and its partners was provided by work with organisations in Hungary earlier this year to assist their planning for more diverse forms of childcare.

This work has been made possible through the support of Tipton City Challenge and will form a firm foundation for the continued development of childminding services.

Save the Children has built on its relationship with the National Childminding Association, both in training and in the development of new programmes throughout the work in Tipton.

We are pleased to have contributed something of lasting benefit for the children of Sandwell.

Judy Lister
Regional Director,
UK Central and Eastern Europe Region,
Save the Children

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Introduction

The aims of the Tipton Childminding Project were consistent with Save the Children's (SCF) policy and childcare strategic aims in 1994. SCF's position statement on childcare talked of "developing innovative and flexible ways of meeting the changing needs of children and their families; working in partnership with other organisations in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors", and "raising the status of childcare work and workers by promoting training and good working conditions, recognition of their essential role in the development of young children".

Save the Children had proven experience in training and supporting childcare workers. From its work in Manchester with the Trinity House Childminding Support Project, Save the Children also had experience of developing and supporting services for childminders, running childminder drop-ins and toy libraries and had an understanding of issues affecting childminders.

Save the Children wanted to contribute to childminding development in Sandwell by:

- increasing the access to and quality of training and support opportunities for childminders
- working with other voluntary and statutory agencies to develop links between childminding and other forms of childcare provision
- demonstrating the value of different forms of childminding support in raising the quality of childminding.

The Tipton Childminding Project had clear links with other Save the Children work in both Manchester and Merseyside. The initiative provided a great opportunity to introduce into Sandwell policy and practice achievements from other Save the Children projects in the UK. It was also recognised that parents, carers and their children would benefit significantly from any development work with minders.

The day-to-day management of the Project was the responsibility of Save the Children, supported by a multi-disciplinary Advisory Group. The group consisted of the Assistant Programmes Director, Save the Children West Midlands, the Project Manager, the Regional Development Manager of the National Childminding Association, the Social Services Manager with responsibility for Under 8's and the Regional Officer for the Pre-school Learning Alliance Borough Association.

The principal aims of the Project when it began in 1994 were agreed by the partners to be:

- to increase the access to and quality of training and support opportunities for childminders and child carers in the Tipton Challenge area
- to increase the numbers of childminders and child carers from all sections of the community in order to meet the needs of children and parents
- to promote inter-agency initiatives to develop links between childminding and other forms of childcare provision
- to demonstrate the value of different forms of childminding support in raising the quality of childminding.

The Tipton Childminding Project Steering Group

Margaret Thompson	Assistant Programmes Director, Save the Children (February 1994)
Lakhvir Rellon	Project Manager (February 1994)
Peter Forth	Principal Social Worker, Social Services Department, Sandwell (November 1995)
Judy Warner	Regional Manager, National Childminding Association (February 1994)
Sue Heard	Pre-School Learning Alliance (February 1994)
Heather Chinner	Chief Executive's Department, Sandwell (February 1994 – 1996)
Steve Brightman	Manager, Children's Services (June 1996)
Joanne Hensman	Sandwell Borough Childminding Association (February 1996)

Chronological History of the Tipton Childminding Project

1993

Planning and development between City Challenge, SCF and the Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC).

1994

Project leader and Project worker appointed.

Administrator appointed.

Childminder recruitment campaign for Tipton launched.

Survey of Tipton Childminders carried out.

First Childminder Support Groups in Sandwell established in Tipton.

Mobile Toy Library and Equipment Loan Service established for Tipton.

Piloted Introduction to Childminding Sessions in Tipton and Great Bridge, post-registration training developed.

Vacancy database for Tipton Childminders started.

Art Project on Disability Awareness facilitated by community artist.

Successful bid for Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding to develop a borough-wide Mobile Toy Library for childminders.

Work in partnership with NCMA to develop the Sandwell Borough Childminding Association.

Articles in City Challenge press on the Project's concerns around unregistered minding.

Newsletter to Tipton minders.

Attend and represent Sandwell at the National Childminding Association Conference (NCMA) and AGM in Newcastle.

First Christmas Party for childminders and minded children.

First co-ordinated social event for childminders and parents: Christmas meal.

Project represents Sandwell at Regional NCMA meetings.

Joint work with Parental Support Project (City Challenge funded) 'Learning through play'.

1995

First Sandwell Childminders' Fun Day held during National Childminding Week.

Time-limited support offered to childminders wanting to set up Support Groups in other parts of the borough.

Development of Bulk Buy (Art and Craft) Scheme for childminders.

Preparatory work for developing the Mobile Toy Library.

Expansion of training session offered to childminders.

Increased development work with Borough Association.

Involved in the inaugural meeting of the Sandwell Borough Childminding Association.

Invited by SCF Central and Eastern European Department to work with them on a childcare initiative in Hungary.

Departure of Margaret McCaig, Administrator.

Project successfully bids for funding to extend Equipment Loan Service across the borough.

Support Groups developed in other parts of Sandwell.

Newsletter circulated to all Sandwell minders.

Move to Hawthorns House; project renamed Childminding Resource Centre.

Wonderland trip (outing for Sandwell minders).

Worker employed for The Travelling Toy Box.

Worker employed for the Equipment Loan Service.

1996

Project Manager visits Kobanya, Hungary, to deliver a presentation on the Tipton Childminding Project.

Launch of the Mobile Toy Library and Equipment Loan Service.

Consolidation of Training Scheme: training for other boroughs and organisations.

Groups established in many localities and running independently.

Summer play schemes use the Bulk Buy service for the first time.

Hungarian delegates from Kishunhalas visit to see the work of the Project.

New Administrator, Paula Watts appointed, working 25 hours for Project and 10 hours for The Travelling Toy Box.

Full staff team attend NCMA Conference.

Diwali event followed by Project staff interviews on BBC Radio Asian Network.

Co-ordinated borough-wide Fun Day.

Lakhvir Rellon visits Kiskunhalas, Hungary, to deliver a presentation on the Tipton Childminding Project.

Fundraising event: Fashion Show (Connaught Fashions).

Childminding Resource Centre offers placements to volunteers and students.

Trip to National Sea Life Centre during summer holidays.

Six month social work placement from the University of Central England.

Volunteers and students attend Presentation Evening at the centre.

1997

Sandwell minders join West Midlands Region NCMA. Representative from Project withdrawn.

Work of the projects at the Childminding Resource Centre feature in a Central Television programme on the work of SCF in the Midlands.

Above *Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal chatting to Tipton childminders and minded children on her visit to Sandwell*

Mayors visit the group at Wednesbury.

Trip to Wyre Forest.

Displays of Project's work tour the libraries in the borough.

Preparations for the visit of Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, president of SCF, to Sandwell to meet minders at the Project offices.

Minders and the Project work together to plan publication and conference to document achievements of the Project.

1998

Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, president of Save the Children, visits Sandwell to celebrate the conclusion of the work of the Tipton Childminding Project and to wish childminders well in their future development.

Launch of Minding – your own business – an evaluation report of the Tipton Childminding Project.

The Development of the Tipton Childminding Project

Background Information

The Tipton Childminding Project arose from an initiative developed by the Sandwell Childcare Resource Group, an interdepartmental officers' group, which included representation from the voluntary sector. The group had been meeting for two years prior to the bid for the Project being presented to Tipton City Challenge in 1993. The group had recently produced a Childcare Strategy for Sandwell and also produced a Strategy for Childminders.

Within the Social Services Department (SSD), responsibility for all children's day care, including childminders, lay with a team of eight social workers. Prior to 1993, however, there had been far fewer full time staff responsible for children's day care in Sandwell. As a result of this, the amount of work undertaken with childminders, particularly in terms of support and development, had been limited.

The demands of The Children Act, together with local interpretations of regulations and allocation of responsibilities and reorganisations of Social Services Departments, resulted in childminding continuing to be a low priority for many local authorities. (Re-registration of all individual minders also created a backlog of inspections.)

Sandwell is a very deprived borough with high levels of unemployment and poverty. As with other areas, there is recognition that provision of childcare is a crucial factor in enabling people to embark on training or enter employment. With the recession of 1993 – 94 the development and support of childminding was even more important in order to provide quality alternatives to those unable to afford nursery costs, as well as counter the growth of unregistered minding. It was also felt particularly important to explore ways of supporting relatives who were caring for children. This was expected to be, and from the experience of the Project workers found to be, the major source of childcare in Tipton, the City Challenge area.

The Project Brief

The Tipton Childminding Project was developed as an inter-agency and corporate initiative to improve the provision and support for childminders and informal child carers in the Tipton City Challenge area.

Two full time workers were employed, ensuring mutual support, together with an administrative support worker (25 hours per week).

The Project provided an opportunity to implement and extend work expected to be undertaken by social services staff. With a focus on childminding in a defined geographical area the Project could focus on exploring ways of working which, due to resource constraints and legislative demands, were difficult for Social Services to pursue.

The First Year

Little was known of the demand for childminding and of Tipton childminders, and so the initial task of the Project workers was to actually meet the childminders and listen to what they had to say. There were fourteen childminders registered for the Tipton area on the Social Service Department lists and all were given a chance to talk and be listened to.

Project workers assumed that if a person's name was on the SSD childminder list they were actively minding. This was not the case at all. Of those on the list some had gone through the registration process but had never actually minded; others had ceased minding years earlier; others had moved. This was an issue that The SSD were aware of and during the lifetime of the Project, the voluntary sector, including SCF, and the local authority worked together in partnership to access Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding to develop a Childcare Information Service for Sandwell.

Initial contact with minders was made by letter, to raise awareness of the Project and its aims. The letters were followed with home visits, with much time devoted to building relationships and gaining trust. It was essential that minders were honest about their concerns and the issues which affected them. It was stressed that while the Project was working in partnership with the SSD, the Project workers were from the voluntary sector and therefore independent of the local authority (the Registration and Inspection Unit) – the Project did not have a policing role. A questionnaire was used to stimulate discussion (see Appendix 1: Tipton Childminding Project Questionnaire).

Generally, the minders all spoke of very similar, overwhelming feelings. Many expressed feelings of low self-esteem – they did not feel respected, and felt most people regarded them as just babysitters. The majority felt isolated and marginalised and felt they had very little support. Many talked of feeling undervalued, underutilised and expressed feelings of being exploited by parents. The minders concerned worked extremely long hours for very low wages (£1.00 an hour or even less). This raised the issue of parents not being prepared to pay appropriate rates for childcare.

The fact that daycare advisors called once a year for an inspection visit was commented on. This was often the minder's only contact with anyone other than the parents and children in their childminding role. It became apparent that most childminders knew little about others in the same role in Tipton; only two minders knew each other as friends and two were related. All the minders we spoke to were aware of the National Childminding Association but there was little, if any, knowledge of the support available from them.

Many also talked of having to turn away children because they did not have appropriate equipment, for example, they could not manage two toddlers if they did not have a double buggy.

By May 1994 the workers had collated questionnaires and conducted interviews with all the minders. This process maximised the childminders' involvement and consultation in the development of the Project, ensuring that the service developed would be appropriate to the needs of the childminders themselves. The survey certainly gave Project workers a clear, up-to-date profile of the childminding scene in Tipton. (See Appendix 2: Tipton Childminding Project Questionnaire Analysis.)

This first phase of work provided a report for action. The major focus of the Project by this stage was to develop support mechanisms through drop-ins, a toy library, loaning equipment and promoting and delivering childminder training. Another priority was to encourage the involvement of the National Childminding Association through Judy Warner, NCMA Midlands Regional Manager. Judy, an extremely valuable member of the Steering Group, had been involved with the Project from an early stage.

Above *The Team in Tipton 1994: Margaret McCaig (Administrator), Lakhvir Kellon (Project Manager), Kate Mitchinson (Project Worker)*

There was also work to be done with other organisations to ensure support for minders and the community at large to raise awareness about the significance of good quality childcare practice.

Bringing Sandwell to Tipton... and Taking Tipton to Sandwell

From the beginning, staff detected resentment towards the Project from other child carers who felt it was unfair that childminders should be focused on in this way and provided with so many resources. Other groups with a focus on childcare working in the community felt that they too should be entitled to similar resources and support and were also disgruntled.

There was resentment too from childminders who could not access the Project because they did not live in the City Challenge area. Tipton minders were receiving training, able to loan equipment, have one-to-one support, access to a Mobile Toy Library and support groups – other minders outside Tipton commented that this was totally unfair. Sandwell childminders began to contact the Project in the belief that they would be able to access the services. Staff at the Project had the difficult task of explaining that the service was targeting only those who lived in the Challenge area.

It became apparent that the development of childminders in the Tipton area alone was causing problems in the rest of the borough. By focusing on

such a small group of childminders it seemed that divisions between the childminders were being encouraged, leading to competition rather than mutual support. The Project workers believed strongly that it was essential for Tipton childminders to interact with other childminders across Sandwell. If they could identify with minders outside Tipton it would give them all a stronger identity and a louder voice. If they remained parochial they would not gain from the support of the other minders (around 3000 in Sandwell.

An undesirable situation was in danger of developing – a core group of highly skilled, highly trained and professional childminders would be available in Tipton with the service provided by minders outside Tipton viewed as inferior. Tipton minders would become marginalised and seen as elitist.

Many strategies were used to try to bring Sandwell childminders into Tipton so they could interact with the minders involved with the Project. They were invited to take part in a day trip to the Wyre Forest – an ideal opportunity for the minders to get to know each other in an informal social setting. It was hoped that through this interaction Tipton minders would develop an interest in what was happening on the childminding scene borough-wide.

The Project then co-ordinated the first Sandwell Fun Day for childminders which was held during National Childminding Week. The event was held at the Tipton Leisure Centre where the Tipton minders Support Group met. This was a deliberate strategy to bring Sandwell minders into Tipton and to encourage interaction and the building of friendships and relationships. This was a crucial turning point in the development of the Project – it had been running in Tipton for over a year and suddenly minders from outside Tipton were desperately asking for support. It was proving difficult to contain the pressure.

By late 1994 the Project had outgrown its small offices and suitable, spacious office accommodation was very difficult to find in Tipton. In early 1995 the Project made a strategic decision in consultation with City Challenge to move to a more central location in the borough and to give sections of the Project's work a more borough-wide focus. Several models for developing work with childminders had been developed in Tipton and it was felt the time was right to expand this work to other parts of Sandwell.

After a painstaking search, the office that later became the Sandwell Childminding Resource Centre was found. Those who saw the office commented on the large amount of space and wondered whether an office of that size was necessary. The Project, however, was sure that all this space would be needed. There were already plans to develop further work such as the borough-wide Mobile Toy Library, the Sandwell Equipment Loan Service for Registered Childminders and the Bulk Buy Scheme.

Development and Involvement in the Borough Association

The Project worked closely with Judy Warner, NCMA, from the early days to mobilise childminders from across Sandwell. All agencies acknowledged that, with support, the minders would gain great benefits from forming their own member-led and representative organisation. The difficulty was that in other areas there were usually some informal mechanisms in place, such as support groups, which developed the confidence of childminders and led to their serving on a committee. However, in Sandwell, the Project was supporting minders to develop their own groups and simultaneously support a group to form a Borough Childminding Association. The first meeting, in 1994, attracted a large number of minders. The numbers waned gradually over the next few meetings but those remaining proved to be a core of very committed people who felt that they had time available, enthusiasm and enough energy to get involved.

The establishment and development of the Borough Childminding Association has not been an easy process. The members of the association all have responsibilities during the day and invariably family commitments in the evenings. However, it is to the childminders' credit that, despite all the difficulties of undertaking the responsibility of membership of a committee in one's voluntary time, the association has gone from strength to strength.

The Project believed Tipton minders would be a strong voice on the committee of the Sandwell Borough Childminding Association because of the heightened level of awareness that existed among them on childminding issues. However, the reverse happened. There was certainly some positive attendance at the initial meetings but when there was an expectation of commitment, Tipton minders were not as forthcoming as those from other parts of the borough. It was extremely difficult to involve Tipton minders in the work that was developing across Sandwell. There were a number of contributory factors which led to the Tipton minders not feeling that they were part of the Sandwell developments: a history of parochialism, lack of transport, family commitments after the childminding day and not feeling the need to be involved because the Project was able to offer them everything they needed.

Support Groups

Support groups developed in Tipton have not been sustainable. Initially the groups were set up and run by the workers at the Project as requested by the childminders. It became increasingly apparent that this model of project workers running sessions would not be sustainable in terms of the exit strategy of the Project. Because of the time-limited nature of the Project, it was important that childminders could develop the skills necessary to service these groups and ensure their sustainability.

However, because of the large number of City Challenge-funded projects working in Tipton, local people were becoming used to services being provided for them rather than being encouraged to develop support mechanisms for themselves. The model of project workers running sessions was also

Above *The first childminder support group in Tipton, Sandwell*

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unsatisfactory because of the pressure to provide support to minders outside the City Challenge area. It was also crucial that minders "did it for themselves" to ensure the independence of the groups themselves.

From October 1995 there was a deliberate change of strategy and the decision was taken to offer groups time-limited support in order to get them to the point where they could become independent NCMA constituted groups, with their own financial structure and committee. This was felt to be the most sustainable format for the long-term survival of the groups post March 1998. These groups would in turn support the Sandwell Borough Childminding Association.

The Project offered six weeks initial support to the groups. In practice this needed to be a flexible arrangement. Support was offered when identifying an appropriate venue, in contacting local childminders and by providing a worker for the start-up sessions. The Project paid the venue hire fees for the first six weeks and provided a start-up pack of tea, coffee, toys and art materials.

Minders were encouraged to develop these drop-ins as they could provide an opportunity for mutual support and also structured play opportunities in a group setting for their minded children. It was also considered to be a release from the isolation of being a lone worker in their own home.

However, this model did not work in Tipton. Many reasons were given by those minders who did not want to attend the groups. Tipton is not a large area but many minders did not have access to their own transport and this prevented them from attending. Others were just so busy with school pick-ups and family commitments that they did not see a support group as a priority.

It has been consistently difficult to sustain support groups in Tipton. More than once, staff attempted to promote the groups' independence but when staff withdrew their high level of support and ceased to run the group', the groups had difficulties with attendance. Twice, the group which had previously been cohesive, dwindled to one or two members when staff attempted to withdraw.

Staff felt strongly that there was little incentive for childminders to do things for themselves' as the area was heavily resourced and there were many different projects, all attempting to attract child carers to make use of their resources. Some childminders thought the Project was there to provide services for them, i.e. to actually run support groups, and found it difficult to understand or accept our philosophy of empowering them to build and facilitate sustainable self-help support groups that would survive once City Challenge funding ceased.

Support groups in the rest of the borough have gone from strength to strength. The policy of openly declaring limited support has led to minders taking responsibility for the group from the very beginning.

Childminders in the successful groups were aware that they would need to be self-supporting and so have worked alongside the Project to develop their own structure. Some groups have taken longer to form than others as childminders were reluctant to come forward to take responsibility. A flexible approach was taken with these groups and longer periods of support were offered to ensure childminders developed their confidence.

Diwali

A constant dilemma for the Project was how to make an issue like equality fun and interesting to explore rather than something to be shunned because of minders' previous negative experiences of equality training, or a belief that it was an issue that did not affect them.

When a training session was organised on 'equal opportunities' only one person attended. When the same course was advertised as 'Resources to Support Anti-Discriminatory Practice' there was a waiting list of people wanting to attend!

The Project had a policy of organising one-off big events to demonstrate models that could be used by other agencies in the long-term. Diwali was one such event. There were a large number of Asian children being looked after by childminders and we wondered whether minders gave consideration to the fact that this festival was a big occasion in the lives of these children.

Above *Staff, a Social Work student, and a Leisure and Recreation student making up the team at the Childminding Resource Centre in November 1990*

The Project workers had consistently had requests from minders to learn more about other cultures and festivals. They were aware that many minders would not feel comfortable taking a child to a temple if they had never been to a temple themselves. It was also important that all children felt comfortable entering a place of worship other than their own so that mutual understanding and respect developed.

The Shree Krishna Temple was first approached with the request that it could be used as a venue for a Diwali Resource Day, expecting that they would be too busy to offer much more support than that. Their enthusiastic, supportive response totally overwhelmed us. Not only did the temple want to open its door to childminders and minded children, it also wanted to know more about childminding – a route to the recruitment of Asian Childminders which could and should be explored further. Members of the Temple Committee took time off work to attend and played an active part in the proceedings.

The team had agreed this was not to be an 'all dancing, all singing' cultural day. The objective was to introduce childminders to different ideas and resources which could be used in their own homes to further develop their own and the children's understanding of Diwali. There were worksheets, arts and crafts materials which could be bought (glitter, candles, diwas, card etc.). Children and adults were able to go and sit by the shrine, listen to bilingual storytelling and play with a range of multicultural resources. Volunteers in the arts area worked with children on creating Diwali cards, diwas and ornate decorations.

The event was an extremely cost-effective way of working with a large number of childminders and minded children. The Project workers felt they had certainly achieved their objective when the comments on the evaluation sheets talked of wanting to attend further events and wanting to explore equal opportunities further.

The Project was repeatedly asked if it would hold another event the following year, but as previously stated, the intention was to demonstrate that it could be done. It is the responsibility of all agencies to ensure that the work is not forgotten. This model worked well because:

- it provided a networking opportunity for the childminders

- offered an opportunity for all minded children to participate in a large group activity within their own community
- the principles of equality were discussed and demonstrated in enjoyable but subtle ways rather than in a confrontational and challenging way
- everyone left wanting more knowledge and information.

Bulk Buy (Art and Craft) Scheme

From the start of the Project art and craft materials were made available to groups in Tipton for use in play sessions. Workers at the Project encouraged minders to involve children in art activities at drop-in support sessions and demonstrated ideas and techniques for art and craft activities. This was supported by offering childminders the opportunity to take part in the Pre-School Learning Alliance 'Learning Through Play' course.

As part of the work with groups outside the Tipton area, where the Project offered time-limited support to help childminders establish support groups, Project staff gave each new group a start-up pack of paint, paper and glue to enable minders to provide art and craft activities at sessions.

It became increasingly apparent that, as groups continued over a period of time, stocks would need to be replenished and therefore the Project began to purchase basic art and craft materials in bulk in order to offer them at cost price to local childminder groups. As the Project purchased in bulk the savings were considerable for groups.

Requests from individual minders to use the service led to an expansion of the scheme and all money from the purchase of items was ploughed back into the Bulk Buy Scheme to expand the range of items available. At this time the scheme was opened to other groups in Sandwell, Pre-School Learning Alliance, After School Groups and Holiday Play Schemes.

The emphasis was on high quality art and craft materials and included materials such as 'people coloured' paints, papers, pens and crayons, sponge prints for symbols and all major festivals. A small library of resource packs was available to give childminders ideas and information; ideas for things to do were also included in each newsletter and a training session on the subject of 'messy play' offered extended ideas around art and craft themes.

The Bulk Buy Scheme was taken to events such as Fun Days and Diwali where minders could purchase equipment. The Project also used the materials for the art activities at the Diwali event. Project staff and volunteers have regularly taken the Bulk Buy Scheme to drop-in support groups to sell to local childminders. This has proved successful and many minders preferred the service to be taken to them.

The Bulk Buy Scheme offered practical support to childminders and other day care workers. It was often practical support that formed the initial contact between childminders and Project staff. Work such as the Bulk Buy Scheme formed an effective vehicle, which drew childminders into the overall work of the Project.

Conclusions

Consolidation of the Sandwell Borough Childminding Association

Save the Children and the Sandwell Borough Childminding Association (SBCMA) are anxious that the foundations that the Project has laid around childminding development in Sandwell need to be built upon rather than left to crumble. It is acknowledged by all the partnership agencies that unless the association continues to receive support, advice and guidance in its early years, it may not be sustainable in the long term. It is envisaged that with continued support the association will be in a position to organise support groups, co-ordinate the Equipment Loan Service and organise training sessions. The Project has witnessed the childminders' developing confidence from being a part of their own association. The Project feels confident that SBCMA will, in the long term, be effective advocates for childminders in Sandwell and ensure that childminding is recognised as a positive choice in childcare. SBCMA also has a role to play in keeping childminders throughout Sandwell informed of new developments and issues both on a regional and national level.

As the Project comes to the end of its life, SBCMA is still at a very early stage of development and could still founder. It is crucial that agencies and workers who have an interest in the provision of quality childcare capitalise and support the initiative of Sandwell childminders to help themselves. A strong, confident, professional association will not only benefit the childminding service in Sandwell but also the parents and children who use that service.

Save the Children believes that through the experience of developing the Tipton Childminding Project it has a deep awareness of the extent of support still being requested by Sandwell childminders. There is a real opportunity for other agencies in Sandwell to consolidate work developed by the Project and to incorporate sections of work which could be left with an uncertain future, such as the Equipment Loan Service.

Training

Those involved with the Project believed strongly that it was essential to develop stronger links between childminders and other providers of childcare. Whenever possible, training has been widened to accommodate childcare workers other than childminders. This has provided an opportunity for real discussion between minders and workers who care for children in group settings. Social events were also increasingly opened to other child carers so that interaction between them and childminders would be maximised. Childminding is a private arrangement between parent and childminder and once a minder has completed the pre-registration training (obligatory in Sandwell) and received the Registration Certificate there is no compulsory training. It is very much up to the individual how they choose to spend the day with their minded children and whether they wish to develop their skills to enhance the quality of care received by the child.

Training has formed a focus for a large amount of work with childminders over the life of the Project. From the beginning, Tipton childminders requested training and this was recognised by them as an important issue.

A concern at the time was the number of people who went onto pre-registration training courses and even through the registration process although they had decided not to mind. Some did not have enough information about childminding before they went on the training and so had not made an informed decision on whether it was the appropriate career choice for them.

The Project piloted briefing sessions on Introduction to Childminding sessions in Tipton and found that they were very effective. Participants received clear information on what childminding was really about and were offered support in making a decision. These sessions were recognised as beneficial and by 1995 were being delivered around the borough on a monthly basis by Social Services Department and the Tipton Childminding Project.

It is important not to underestimate the benefits of an independent development agency and the statutory regulating agency working together on these sessions.

Social Services Departments have a limited role in regulating the terms and conditions under which childminders offer their services and the nature of the childminding they provide. By making contact with individuals at the point where they were considering whether it was an appropriate option for them, the Project workers were able to raise issues around the need for continuous skills development, the importance of interaction with other childminders and the value of group activities for minded children. Raising awareness that minding is not substitute parenting is crucial – childminding is a career choice and one which needs to be undertaken professionally. A great deal of self-discipline is needed for the childminder to maintain a professional attitude to their role – once a minder becomes registered they are under no obligation to interact with anybody until the daycare advisor visits a year later for an inspection. However, knowing that support is available is vital – there are over 300 childminders in Sandwell and the Project communicated regularly with all of them.

At the height of the Project's interaction with minders, training became the focal point for the Project, with it becoming one of the largest providers of independent daycare training and post-registration childminding training. Increasingly, the Project used the in-house skills of the team to provide a variety of training focused on the needs of childminders in particular. The Project also used external trainers where specific skills were required, for example, Kid's Club Network, St. Johns Ambulance, Sandwell Victim Support Scheme.

Staff were also involved in delivering Childminders Specific Training with other organisations both in Sandwell and neighbouring authorities.

In the final year of the work the Project was delivering one training session a month for childminders (25 places). It is proposed that the training packs developed will be available as a resource for agencies wishing to develop work with minders in Sandwell in the future.

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Above *Lakhvir Kellon, project leader, in workshop discussion with childminders*

Issues and Recommendations

Issue One

Minders complained that they received mixed messages about what was permissible and what was not.

"Things we can and cannot do should be written down. I get so confused, I never know if The SSD will think I'm doing the right thing."

"It confuses me when I get so many mixed messages as to what I can and cannot do as a childminder."

"I'm reluctant to pass on information that I've been given at my annual visit to other childminders because I'm never sure if it's right."

"I've been picked up on things during my inspection visit, for example, berries in the garden, and yet other minders with berries have never had the issue raised with them."

"I was told I couldn't leave the minded children in the car for a couple of minutes while I dropped one off in the school. I had arranged for my emergency cover to stay in the car with them but I was told they were not sure I could do this."

Recommendation

Written guidelines could be produced by Social Services Department in consultation with the Borough Association. These could then be given to childminders during the registration process and would avoid confusion and uncertainty.

Issue Two

While the Project has worked with childminders to develop a framework of support mechanisms in Sandwell, there are other issues around the relationship between childminders and social services. Childminders are very willing to talk but do not feel they are being heard.

"Every year we get the same form prior to our inspection visit. So I filled it in the same as last year. I was told I shouldn't give the same answers every year. I said I shouldn't be asked the same questions every year."

"I was told a child had to be fed every four hours. How can I make a child eat when he doesn't want to?"

"I've had a lot of work through the SSD and its been great. When you see the look on the faces of children and their parents it's all worthwhile."

"It wasn't a supportive visit – they've obviously got the safety of children as a priority; I understand that and they have to do their job. But the visit I had knocked all the confidence out of me. My wanting to contact them again went."

Recommendation

An independent agency be approached to undertake a project to gather information about the experience and views of childminders. A 'policing' registration and inspection role can be difficult to balance with a befriending role; however, the issues raised by minders appear to focus on the rules and regulations that affect their day-to-day work as minders.

At present there is no mechanism for these collective views to be heard. If minders find their contact with social services disturbing, intimidating or confrontational, we have witnessed withdrawal and heard rumours of covert activity.

Issue Three

The Project identified unregistered minding as being a major issue in Sandwell, as in many other boroughs. Staff found it difficult to address this issue in any meaningful way for one of two reasons:

The general public have very little awareness of childminding and the legislative framework within which it fits so individuals may not be aware of the need for registration.

Social services departments need to be clear about their legal position and there was uncertainty as to what would happen to an individual who was reported for minding illegally.

Recommendation

A public awareness raising campaign could be undertaken. This could focus on the profiling of childminding as a profession and the necessity of registration. Social services could also produce clear information on the actions that would be taken in the event of someone being reported. This information may be widely displayed and distributed through libraries, health centres, play groups, etc.

Issue Four

In Sandwell, in common with other boroughs, there are low numbers of Asian and Black Registered Childminders. Recruitment campaigns have been co-ordinated but to date have not created any increase in the number of applications for registration from minority communities.

Recommendation

A public awareness raising campaign could be piloted with one identified community. A holistic approach needs to be taken in the sense that every age group needs to be given information. Particular points about childminding need to be communicated:

- What is childminding?
- How to become a childminder
- Implications of informal minding
- Childminding as a positive childcare option.

If working, for example, with the Asian community, displays could be circulated in temples, Asian shops, community centres and schools. Existing groups could be accessed by working with postholders whose responsibility specifically relates to Asian communities.

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The issue of what levels of support can be offered to prospective minders needs to be considered:

- mentoring
- 'hand-holding'
- practical assistance with applications
- interpreting, translated information.

Some thought also needs to be given to the appropriateness of the standard pre-registration training. Does it need adapting? Is there any specific information which needs including? Could the training accommodate family members, for example, to examine issues around the implications of childminding on the family?

Issue Five

Registered childminders are increasingly being used by the Social Services Department as a way of providing childcare for families in need. Many childminders are willing to provide this service but a number have commented that necessary training and support is not consistently offered. Childminders have spoken of the need for more support, more contact with the social workers and other professionals, access to resources and a reasonable level of payment.

"I've looked after children for the SSD in the past but I've had so many difficulties. I wasn't told very much about the children – there was no communication with the SSD – I didn't get any information, no support and the payments weren't very good. Trying to get in touch with the SSD is so difficult. I wasn't offered any training. I was originally told I couldn't do it because a sponsored childminder had to be a nurse, NNEB or a teacher. Then 18 months later I had a call saying the rules had been changed and I could look after a child for them. Apparently now any childminder who lives in the area can be approached to look after a sponsored child."

"I was once told I would be looking after a child for six weeks and then the placement would finish. They forgot to tell the parent and she turned up with the child as usual after I had been told to stop minding the child."

"We need more information, more training, support and contact with the SSD and the payment is terrible. £10 for looking after a child for a whole day!"

Recommendation

Specific and regular training could be developed to allow sponsored childminders to develop a range of flexible skills. There is also a need for regular one-to-one support and supervision. A mechanism needs to be developed which would allow for communication and liaison between social services, parents and other agencies involved with the placement.

The Partnership

Given the requirements of The Children Act and the necessity of co-operative working towards an integrated childcare provision, it was essential from the beginning that the Save the Children initiative be supported by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) at senior management level and that close working arrangements be developed on the ground. When the Tipton City Challenge bid was successful, there was support from social services senior management and a willingness to enter into a written partnership agreement.

From the beginning of the Project becoming operational it was evident that effective consultation should have been ensured with all partner agencies prior to the first staff being recruited. The officers responsible for developing the Project proposal had moved on, and therefore much work was needed to forge new relationships. There is a real lesson to be learned here about ownership. If a partnership Project is to be an effective and a real partnership, it is essential that workers, officers and senior management are kept informed and that there is consistent officer support for the purpose of continuity. It is essential that organisations take ownership rather than individuals making agreements in isolation. In 1994 both Save the Children and local authorities had been through varying degrees of reorganisation which had led to working relationships being lost. The new Assistant Programmes Director for Save the Children did not have the contacts in Sandwell Social Services Department that her predecessor had. Also the new

delegated officer from Social Services had not been kept fully informed by their department of the focus of the work and the commitment Social Services Department had entered into by signing a written partnership agreement.

The impact of change can indeed be very forceful. There is a need to be constantly aware of this impact and to be committed to a strategy that focuses on developing relationships. The partnership was agreed before the Project began in 1994 but never effectively renewed after that.

Save the Children has recognised, through working in other parts of the UK and the world, that organisational cultures can be very difficult. Changes at director level especially can have a huge impact. All three partner agencies experienced changes at senior management level over the life of the Project. It is vitally important to the success of a Project that contingency plans be considered at the beginning: "What will happen in the future?" Partnership agreements need to be owned and understood at all levels. Senior management may well have the best of intentions when entering into a partnership but if front line staff have not been kept informed, do not understand, agree with or support a particular section of work, then potential for conflict is present from the beginning.

Project staff felt frustrated at the placing of the Tipton Childminding Project in the Business and Enterprise monitoring group of Tipton City Challenge. It was felt that a monitoring group specifically focusing on community development or childcare issues could perhaps have provided different levels of support which the Project would have found beneficial. This monitoring group would have been more supportive and provided childcare/community development projects with a stronger focus, monitoring the Project far more effectively.

Save the Children's experience in working on other regeneration projects with other local authorities has shown clearly that these are by no means unique experiences particular to Sandwell MBC and Tipton City Challenge. These are structural issues which need to be addressed at the outset when a proposal for funding is prepared. Ownership and a real understanding of the focus of a project needs to be true of all partnership agencies to avoid false expectations, unfair criticisms and to foster a sense of unity of purpose.

Useful lessons can be drawn from the experience of the partnership agreement relating to the Tipton Childminding Project.

- If an agency is seeking to enter a partnership agreement to set up a project, it is essential that front line staff, and any other staff who will have contact with the project, be consulted and kept informed of developments to foster a real sense of ownership of the work.
- The partnership agencies may wish to consider applications from their staff for a secondment to a partnership project. This may be particularly useful in forging relationships between the voluntary sector and the statutory sector during the life of the project.
- There is a need for all agencies to nominate an officer from their organisations to be the project link. Should postholders change, a formal handover with a project update and necessary background information would be useful. Personal introductions or visits can go a long way to forging effective working relationships.
- All partner agencies need to ensure that the partnership project is kept fully informed about their policy and practice. This can prevent service users and project staff receiving mixed messages and inaccurate information from different levels of partner organisations.
- Each partner agency could usefully contribute to the effective reviewing of the project by regularly providing progress reports. This would assist the project in understanding the different perspectives of partner agencies and stimulate discussion on the direction of the project.
- Specifically related to regeneration monitoring, in the Tipton Project's experience monitoring a developmental project is quite different to monitoring an employment or training focused project. More significance needs to be given to the long-term strategy, the involvement of users, the effective consultation process with user groups and the benefits of empowerment 'to do things

for themselves'. The framework of economic regeneration funding places much emphasis on the 'number crunching' type of monitoring which it is difficult to balance with a community development project.

Considerable time, effort and resources are required when agencies enter into partnership projects so it is worth paying careful consideration to all the issues that may impact on the development of the projects. Without this, the work that is produced may fall short of expectations and the target group receive a piecemeal and ad hoc service.

The Tripartite Agreement between Save the Children, Sandwell MBC and Tipton City Challenge produced four years of intensive developmental work with childminders, first in Tipton, and then in the borough of Sandwell. The Project far exceeded the expectations of the early days. Project staff felt that this was a real reflection on the desperation of childminders for support, development and training rather than a result of an effective and strong partnership between the agencies. In hindsight, one can only imagine the impact the Project could have had if the points listed above had been considered before the Project began.

Case Studies

Case Study: Hazel Johnson, Chairperson SBCMA

I first heard about the Project in June 1995 when I was invited to the Tipton Childminding Fun Day; when I went there, I met Kate (Project worker) who was making the tea and I asked her why we didn't have any of this support in Wednesbury.

About six months later, Kate rang and asked if I was interested in getting a support group going – I had a think about it and said yes, I would be interested. So I went with Kate to visit the childminders who lived in the area, and found a venue – and things just started from there.

Before the Project intervened, childminders worked in isolation in our own homes. There was no contact between the childminders unless you were lucky enough to meet one by accident. You were not given a list of minders who lived and worked near you.

The Support Group got us into contact with other minders in the area and then, as we built up our confidence, we would go out together socially and would take the children out together. We have a lot more fun – we still do the same things but we do them in a group.

If the Project hadn't been there and given us that first push, I don't think we would have developed the way we have now. The Project got us together in the first place and gave us the idea. It's a play group now but it's more than that – the childminders get so much support from each other. No-one else gave us a thought – we were just women looking after kids while we were at home with our own kids.

Back in 1995, I enjoyed my childminding but now I feel I have a lot more confidence. I used to be quite nervous; I remember feeling terribly nervous when I went with Kate to look at the first venue for the support group. But now I'll have go at anything. If someone asks me to do anything, I'll say, "Yeah, I'll have a go".

The Project has always been there for us. There's no way we at the Wednesbury Group are going to be forgotten because the Project has let so many people know where we are and what we're doing.

When the Project goes, the support groups will still be there and I have no doubt the Borough Association will continue, but there's not going to be the support Save the Children has been able to offer us. If there's anything going on in the country the Project are the first to know about it. If there's anything that minders should be interested in, the Project lets us know about it and they always try to get us to any courses that are going.

We need so much more support, encouragement and confidence. We need someone locally who can give us that support when we need it. Things may have developed, but if the support from the Project hadn't been there, we wouldn't have continued. There have been times when we've been so nervous and confused but there's always been someone at the office saying, "Don't worry, don't panic. How about trying this or that?"

I don't know what's going to happen in March. I just hope everyone doesn't forget about us.

Case Study: Sharon Bell, Former Tipton childminder

It really helped getting to know other childminders in Tipton. I'd been minding for about a year before I met staff from Save the Children and I didn't know anyone. It was so nice to know that if I had a problem, there was someone who I could talk to. If Save the Children hadn't come along, I doubt the minders would ever have got together because there was no framework of support there. Childminding was a stop-gap for me; I'd always wanted to do the NNEB, and childminding gave me so much experience and really built up my confidence.

When you've got minded children most of the time, you don't know what type of work you're going to get. The Equipment Loan Service that Save the Children set up was great. I never had to turn work away because if I needed to borrow a double buggy or a car seat, I could.

With all the training I underwent as a childminder, it gave me the confidence to go on to do the NNEB and the interview panel were really impressed with my portfolio and all my certificates.

When I've done my NNEB, I'm going to try to find a job. If I can't find one I think I'd feel quite happy to start minding again. I believe then I'd feel confident to be an active member of the Borough Association – I'd enjoy that.

The Project put me in touch with crèches and I really enjoyed the experience that gave me. I realised as a Registered Childminder, lots of opportunities came my way to develop my skills further.

It's sad because when the Project goes, I think the childminders are going to be left on their own again. Without some framework there, it's going to be really difficult. The Social Services Department aren't always able to respond to our queries very quickly.

Save the Children knew us and the minded children – there was always a friendly face!

Case Study: Elaine Wellbourne-Biddle, Tipton Childminder

During my six week pre-registration course, I met a Tipton minder who was working in the crèche. She was already attending the groups being developed by Save the Children. I started going to these as well. I thought the groups were so useful because everyone picked up different contacts, met other childminders, got details of events – things to do with the children.

Because I've got a child of my own, I had some equipment anyway, but when the younger children came, I only had limited equipment. I was able to loan safety gates and fireguards – it saved on finance and space. When I'd finished with a piece of equipment, either because the child left or grew out of it, I could send it back. If it hadn't been for the Equipment Loan Scheme, I would have really struggled. I couldn't have afforded to go out and buy everything at once so I wouldn't have been registered until I got everything that the Social Services Department said I had to. I went on the training in May and by September I was all set up. It would have taken much longer if it hadn't been for the Loan Scheme.

I'd always wanted to do the British Sign Language Training and with the support of Save the Children I've successfully completed my first year. I want to continue next year and then I'm looking forward to other training that'll complement the Sign Language Training. Save the Children seemed to have so many contacts and the staff had so much experience. Before, I wouldn't even have known where to go and how to go about finding the training. Lakhvir (member of staff) sorted all that out for me.

If Lakhvir and Kate hadn't been there, I would probably have done the pre-registration training – because I had to – and it would have taken such a long time to get established that I'd have lost interest in doing any more training. There was always something being put on or different training being offered.

When the Project finishes, I think the minders will probably keep in touch through the Support Groups in Sandwell because we've met quite a few times. There has definitely been a network of contacts developed. But unless Save the Children had put it all into action, I don't see how anything would have started or developed – we'd probably all have carried on doing our own thing in our own homes.

The experience of other childminders now comes down the line to us. If I've got a small issue that crops up, I think, "I know someone else who had a similar problem." And they've usually been in touch with the Project and got advice and in turn they pass the information down to us.

In March when the Project closes we're going to have to try and carry on. If there was a health problem, I'd probably approach the child's parent(s) and the Health Visitor. If it was a financial or legal problem I'd be straight on the phone to the NCMA.

As far as I can see, I'm going to be busy with children up to the year 2000 – the feedback from my minded children's families makes it all worthwhile. They seem to be happy with the service I offer.

I'm enjoying what I do and with the support I've had from Save the Children with my Sign Language Training I'd like to be able to use my new-found skills with minded children.

Tiptonians are cautious people and they either take to a project or they don't. Save the Children came in and talked to us at our level. They seemed to want to listen and they were so friendly. I don't know what's

Above *Minded children in Tipton enjoy a group activity*

going to happen when Save the Children withdraws from working with childminders. I always got the impression from the beginning that the Social Services Department and Save the Children were working together. So if there was any support or advice that I needed I know I could approach either Save the Children or the Social Services Department.

Case Study: Glynis Lloyd, Tipton childminder

When Kate (Project worker) rang, I was quite suspicious – I get so many calls. I was very reluctant but when I met her, I was really impressed. Before I had contact with the Project, I was really lonely. When I heard about what the Project was trying to do, I didn't think anything would come of it. When I went to the drop-in for the first time I'd had a bereavement and everyone was so supportive – I didn't know any other minders before that. I learnt such a lot from the other minders: I found out I had rights as a childminder; I also learnt that other minders had usually experienced similar problems and it really helped to be able to discuss things with each other.

I used to go to a play group originally but no-one spoke to me because I was a childminder. One of the minders is now one of my best friends. My confidence has improved so much – I know now that I've got to stand up for myself. I love my childminding and I really enjoy the courses that the Project has introduced me to: I've done First Aid, Learning through Play and Working with Parents. I've now got the confidence to do crèche work when asked – I didn't even know I could do this before I met other childminders.

If I've got a problem, I know I can ring the Project and get a response straight away. The SSD are helpful but sometimes it can be quite a while before you get a response and most of the time my query needs an urgent response. I've also had support from the NCMA.

Recently I had a real problem with one of the parents. She was very abusive and rude to me and so I went down to the drop-in and saw Kate. She advised me on what I should do and who I should inform. She was able to calm me down and give me the confidence to stand up for myself.

I don't always feel I can talk to the SSD the way I can to staff at the Project. They're independent and are there to support and advise me, and they've introduced me to so many people and places that I never knew I could go to before. If I have another problem, the first thing I would do is contact another childminder because they've probably come across similar problems in the past. I also feel more confident about contacting the NCMA.

When I first started, I just felt as though I was babysitting and I used to be so lonely. I didn't know there were so many other minders in Tipton. I used to say I was "just a childminder". Now, if I'm asked, I say I'm a childminder and it's hard work, but I really enjoy it. When I used to go out with very young Asian and white children, people would stare – I used to think, "What are they thinking?" but now I don't care. I'm proud of being a childminder. I've even had little badges made for the children to say they're out with their minder. When I first started, I was totally on my own and I didn't even know I could get milk for the children.

I'd really like to thank the Project because they've been so supportive over the last four years. Is anyone going to care about us now?

Reports

The Tipton Childminding Project: A Social Services Department Perspective

The Tipton Childminding Project has provided an opportunity to establish an array of support systems for childminders throughout the borough. The Project has been instrumental in setting up and supporting the Sandwell Borough Childminding Association on an ongoing basis. Linked to the development has been the evolution of local support groups across the borough as an important way for childminders to provide support for one another.

The Project has also been a focal point for the development of 'bolt-on' support schemes including the Equipment Loan Service and Mobile Toy Library. Informal support and day-to-day advice on a range of issues relating to childminding has been the staple diet for the team.

In fulfilling this support and advice-giving role, the Project has been able to complement the role of the Social Services Department which has legal responsibility for the registration and inspection of childminders within the Borough. The Children's Day Care Team of the Social Services Department have incorporated these new developments into the Preparation Training Courses for prospective childminders. Representatives from the different strands of support come along to the courses to introduce themselves and inform the group of the opportunities available to them. On inspection, members of the team are also able to signpost people towards these invaluable resources in order to address any issues that arrive and ultimately to improve the quality of care provided by the childminder.

As the Project comes to an end, it will leave behind a legacy of support systems for childminders. It is therefore imperative that all those people and agencies committed to supporting childminders in Sandwell work together to ensure that we build on the firm foundations that have been laid over the past four years.

Steve Brightman
Service Team Manager, Family Support Services

Working in Partnership with the Save the Children Sandwell Childminding Project

The National Childminding Association has been privileged to work alongside our colleagues in Save the Children in this exciting, innovative Project which has encapsulated the elements of support and information, self support and training that is at the heart of NCMA policy.

NCMA and Save the Children have for many years worked in partnership in a variety of ways – another example of two major voluntary organisations working on behalf of children and their carers which has had such a positive outcome. As the Midlands Regional Manager of NCMA, I have been indebted to the Project in many ways, in particular to the support they have offered the NCMA voluntary network locally. Workers from the Project were of great help to me in formulating the borough-wide childminding association which was launched in November 1995. Since the inaugural meeting the workers have been a constant source of support and advice to the Borough Association Committee which has complemented the support offered by myself. Childminders in Sandwell had no formal structure and no local support groups when I came into post in 1993. The Save the Children Project started just after I set up the Midlands office and so right from the start we worked together to develop childminder services which would support the infrastructure of self support, access to training and liaison with other local childminding associations through links with NCMA West Midland Regional Committee. The strength of the Sandwell Borough Childminding Association owes much to the support offered by the Save the Children Project and, while still very much in as infancy, we very much hope that the association will continue to gain in confidence as they take on new and challenging responsibilities in the future.

Another key area of development to which the Project has contributed, is that of setting up local support groups for childminders. When the Project started, no such groups existed; there are now five groups covering the borough with further groups planned. The in-depth support offered to enable such groups to begin has ensured that childminders now have the opportunity to meet one another on a regular basis.

to share ideas and concerns and to access training. Therefore this very isolated group of childcare workers has been given the opportunity to get together to be represented at all levels within the voluntary network and to gain much needed support for themselves and their profession.

Until the NCMA Midlands Office was set up and the Save the Children Project was in place, childminders in Sandwell did not have the opportunity to have their views represented. Childminders now have a voice and the Sandwell Borough Childminding Association is a channel through which childminders and childminding groups can have their say and be represented on a variety of forums both with the statutory authorities, who can use the association to consult on a range of issues relating to childminding, and with other organisations involved with early years care and education.

The Save the Children Project has had a major role in helping the key volunteers in the association to gain in confidence and develop the skills necessary to take on this important role. Affirmation of the skills childminders have and support to develop these skills further has influenced the development of the Borough Association, the childminding groups and individual childminders' pride in the important work they undertake in caring for and educating young children.

NCMA views training for childminders as an important tool in ensuring a high quality childminding service. The Project has offered training on a wide variety of topics relevant to the work of childminders and this has contributed to an increase in good practice within the borough.

So what of the future? We very much hope that the Borough Council will support the joint proposal from NCMA and Save the Children that a development worker be appointed who will carry forward this important piece of work. The Project has made an excellent start and had an important and valuable impact on the childminding services in Sandwell but much remains to be done and we hope that the work of supporting this important service will continue.

Judy Warner
NCMA Midlands Regional Manager

The Achievements of the Tipton Childminding Project

This Project was originally sponsored by the Sandwell Child Care Working Group, an inter-agency group which had been meeting since the 1980s in order to improve the range and quality of childcare in the borough. The group included representatives from a wide range of agencies including Sandwell Council, Barnardos, Save the Children, Sandwell College and Sandwell Trade and Enterprise Council. It was recognised that although childminders provided the vast majority of pre-school child care places in Sandwell, their profile and status was low and they were an isolated and unrecognised work force. In 1994, inspired by the work of Save the Children's Trinity House Childminding Support Project in Manchester, the working group took the opportunity offered by the Tipton City Challenge bid and submitted a proposal for a childminders' support Project. To our delight, the Tipton City Challenge bid was successful, funding for our proposal was approved and the Tipton Childminding Project was born.

It was the hope of the group that the Tipton Childminding Project would, through intensive work in one part of the borough, provide examples of best practice which could then be replicated elsewhere in Sandwell. In particular, the establishment of childminder support groups was seen as an important area of work which would reduce the isolation of childminders and establish a network which could operate independently of the Project. Collaborative work with the Social Services Department, for example, around training for minders, was also seen as a priority which could strengthen links between childminders and the council.

From the outset, the Tipton Childminding Project has made a very positive contribution to wider partnerships working to improve childcare in Sandwell, bringing with it both the perspective of an international voluntary agency with a developmental focus, and the local knowledge and sensitivity based on the Project's work in Tipton. In particular, the Project has played a key role in initiatives such as the establishment of the Mobile Toy Library (The Travelling Toy Box), the Sandwell Childminding

Above *Michael Jarrett, Resource worker, with The Travelling Toy Box at West Bromwich Library*

Association and the Equipment Loan Service for minders. The work of the Project will have a lasting impact on childminding in Sandwell.

Heather Chinner
Former Chairperson of the Childcare Resource Group, Officer of the Regeneration Division of the Chief Executives Department, Sandwell

The Involvement of the Youth Forum, Shree Krishna Mandir, West Bromwich

Save the Children made contact with our mandir through Niranjana Patel, the co-ordinator of our Smarty Club, who has direct links with the Save the Children Childminding Project, Smethwick – she has accessed both the training they provide and the Bulk Buy Scheme. Niranjana approached the Youth Forum regarding a request from Save the Children to hold a Diwali event for childminders at the mandir.

The mandir committee responded very positively to this request – we are very enthusiastic about developing work with children and young people. The Youth Forum is constantly striving to make the mandir as approachable as possible so we were very excited at the prospect of holding such an event.

The mandir has had approaches from local schools in the past specifically for educational purposes when children have been taught about Hindu culture. Diwali is always the favourite event that people like to focus on.

The organisation of the Save the Children event was great fun. Usually when you try to organise an event, there tends to be panic about the number of people attending and the sheer volume of work that needs to be done. Save the Children worked with us to ensure that both agencies worked together in a supportive way. I certainly learned that if you're working on your own, it can be a difficult and uphill struggle but if you work in partnership with other agencies, obstacles can be overcome more easily.

When the Save the Children Childminding Project approached our mandir, one, maybe two people within the Youth Forum had an understanding of what childminding was. I was amazed at the information I was given at the Diwali event and also at the numbers of children that were actually cared for by childminders. I feel we learned a great deal from that one event.

Since the Diwali event, the mandir has been involved in organising other events and we have used the techniques that we learned from organising the event with Save the Children. We are far more systematic and go through each stage of the organisation point by point to ensure everything is considered.

We are very much more aware of the need to consider safety issues when there are so many adults and children in the mandir. The Save the Children workers were very clear that safety issues needed to be considered carefully. We thought we had arranged everything perfectly on the day of the event but when the Save the Children staff started to arrive, they asked us to consider fire exits, safe parking of buggies, and cordoning off areas where young children might have accidents, such as the stairs. It was a very valuable learning point for us and we haven't forgotten it. In the past we have been very relaxed about timing but again, we realised the importance of scheduling and timing as the minders we were catering for had restrictions on their time. They had to pick children up from school and so on.

There was a wonderful atmosphere that day, both adults and children working and enjoying themselves together. It made those of us at the mandir feel valued by the community and also made us aware that we have much to offer to all communities in Sandwell.

Above *The SCF team and members of the temple working together to celebrate Diwali with the children*

Very often small voluntary organisations struggle along without realising that they can be more powerful and successful if they join together to undertake pieces of work. We have worked hard to raise money to rebuild our temple as the old building burnt down a few years ago. I have come to realise that the temple doesn't just belong to the Hindu community but to everyone who lives and works in the area. The temple isn't just a place where Hindus are welcome to come and worship – everyone is welcome. We very much enjoyed our experience with the Save the Children Childminding Project and look forward to working with childminders again in the future.

Pravin Patel
Co-ordinator of the Youth Forum, Shree Krishna Mandir (temple), West Bromwich

THE TIPTON CHILDMINDING PROJECT

Hawthorns Business Centre
Halfords Lane, Smethwick, Warley B66 1BB

Save the Children
Working for a better world for children

TIPTON CHALLENGE
Partnership

Save the Children

FOCUS ON TIPTON

Advice and information for parents

Equipment Loan Service

Tipton Child Care Forum

Childminder networking

Support for grandparents

Child care advice

Inter-agency work

Social events

Advocacy

Organised activities for all minded children

Training

Workshops

Vacancy database

Drop-in support sessions 48 weeks a year

Working locally with the National Childminding Association

GENERAL

A base offering practical support for the Sandwell Borough Association

Support for childminders forming new support groups

Advice and information

Childminding resource materials

Videos

Literature

Working nationally and locally with the National Childminding Association

Consultancy

Networking with childminder groups

Bulk Buy (Art and Craft) Scheme

National Childminding Association publications and reports

Save the Children believes in making quality childcare a reality for all children through a national childcare policy which promotes and supports childcare provision and encourages flexible employment practices for parents.

THE BENEFITS OF QUALITY CHILDMINDING

QUALITY CHILDMINDING OFFERS CHILDREN:

- *the possibility of continuity of care from babyhood to school and beyond*
- *a close relationship with one carer*
- *a home environment*
- *familiar community surroundings.*

QUALITY CHILDMINDING OFFERS PARENTS:

- *choice in selecting a childminder with views on childcare similar to their own*
- *flexible hours.*

QUALITY CHILDMINDING OFFERS MINDERS:

- *the independence of being self-employed*
- *the benefits of working from home.*

Local Drop-in Support Groups for Registered Childminders

What is a drop-in support group?

Childminding can be an isolated profession. Drop-in support groups provide registered childminders with mutual support groups that offer access to advice, information and a chance to discuss problems with people who are doing the same job. Children benefit from group play in a safe environment.

How does a drop-in work?

Drop-ins work on a fairly informal basis with group members attending as and when they wish. A weekly or monthly fee is usually charged to cover the cost of room hire, equipment, tea and coffee. Play sessions tea and coffee are available.

Who runs the sessions?

In most cases local groups form a committee of interested childminders, with a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer for the group taking responsibility for the management of the group. However, it is vitally important for the success of a local group that all members help out at sessions so that the work does not fall on one or two individuals.

How many members do we need to start a group?

You can begin a group with as many members as you like. The National Childminding Association recognises local groups of five or more members.

Save the Children

What about funding?

Funding is available from local and national sources. Sandwell Borough Childminding Association is able to offer small grants to new groups. West Midlands Regional Committee have a policy of supporting new groups with small grants.

Once groups have been established for a year or more, the National Childminding Association are able to give annual grants. As all local groups who adopt the NCMA constitution have the right to charitable status, support groups who have a charity number can fundraise in their own right.

Are there any hidden advantages to becoming a National Childminding Support Group?

Yes! All NCMA local groups are able to discount NCMA membership fees.

Save the Children

Local Drop-in Support Groups for Registered Childminders *Page 2*

The Travelling Toy Box

Opens up to a World of Toys

The Project provides a Mobile Toy Library service in the Borough of Sandwell.

The Travelling Toy Box is possibly the largest of its kind in the United Kingdom in terms of the specific service it provides.

It visits local libraries on a regular basis, and toys are made available to local members of the loan scheme, primarily registered childminders and other carers.

The 'Play and Loan' sessions are organised by the resource worker for the Project, supported by staff within the libraries and local volunteers.

The aim of the Project is to improve the quality of childcare in the borough of Sandwell and to contribute to improvements in early years learning by providing practical support to registered childminders and other carers, including parents, many of whom are on a low income, in the form of access to toys that positively reflect the cultural diversity of communities in Sandwell.

These toys are usually prohibitively expensive and, for many, the loan service can provide the only access.

The Project offers advice on how to make the best use of resources, leading to improved quality of pre-school experience for all children in Sandwell.

It is anticipated that the service will improve the level of support to registered childminders in particular, thereby enhancing the quality of service they provide.

The Travelling Toy Box works in partnership with the local authority, communities and organisations, addressing needs and striving to achieve sustainable lasting benefits to the children of Sandwell.

It aims to fulfil one of the primary aims of all Save the Children work, which is to consider children's overall needs in the wider context of the communities in which they live.

The Travelling Toy Box is a joint initiative between Save the Children, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and the single Regeneration Budget with revenue funding secure until 31 March 2000.

Over the life of the Project, it is anticipated that approximately 2000 children will benefit from the services of The Travelling Toy Box. However, this figure does not reflect the wider context of benefits to registered childminders, other carers and volunteers associated with the Project.

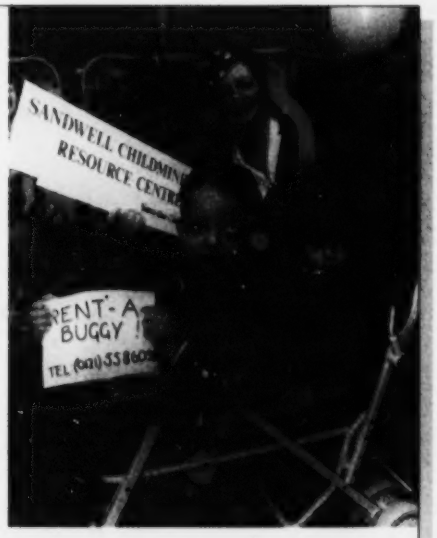
Save the Children

The Travelling Toy Box – The Mobile Toy Library

35

35

Sandwell Childminding Equipment Loan Service



The service is a partnership initiative between:

- **Save the Children**
- **Sandwell Health Authority**
- **Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council**
- **Sandwell Adventure Play Association**
- **Community Transport**

The aim of the service is to supply registered and prospective childminders in Sandwell with equipment of a high standard to enable them to provide a quality service to children, parents and carers.

The service includes both loan equipment and low cost hire-purchase. It gives childminders an affordable option of hiring or purchasing equipment.

Childminders may hire items that would only be needed for a short period of time. Where it would be more economical to purchase items that are needed for a longer period of time the Service is be able to offer items at cost price.

If childminders decide to purchase items after initial hire, the hire fee will go towards the cost price which they would be able to pay by instalments.

It is hoped that providing childminders with British Safety Approved equipment will reduce accidents and help childminders develop good practice and encourage parents to consider safety issues.

As safety issues are raised, the service will be able to provide information, advice and training sessions by networking with other safety organisations, drawing on their expertise in safety and accident prevention. This will be offered to childminders and via them to parents and children.

As the service has been based at the Childminding Resource Centre it has complemented the other aspects of the Project, providing support and practical assistance to registered and prospective childminders.

Save the Children

Sandwell Childminding Equipment Loan Service

Organising a Fun Day

These guidelines are intended as a rough guide to running your own fun day. Pick out what you need in order to make the day successful and easier for you.

Don't try to do everything yourself.
The more people that help to plan and execute the day, the easier it will be. Fun days are hard work for organisers and a small team can be exhausted if they have no assistance. Try to involve other agencies or willing volunteers to help you with the day. Working together using everyone's strengths to best advantage makes things easier. If you have group members with excellent organisational or finance skills, encourage them to use these skills to the best advantage of the group. It's a good idea to assign specific tasks to be completed by a specific time, for example by the next meeting. Planning meetings should be held on a regular basis, starting well in advance of the day.

Finance

Decide early on, as a group, the amount of money you can assign to your fun day. Organising events does not necessarily need to cost a large amount of money, especially if you can utilise your own community skills for publicity, entertainment, face painting and refreshments. If you require bouncy castles, entertainers, large venues and/or professional publicity, you will need to assign a budget. If your organisation can't afford this, perhaps you could apply to your local authority, local businesses or voluntary trust for finances. Keep receipts for everything and draw up a basic accounts sheet so that you know how much money you have and where it's to be spent. Get quotes in writing from contractors or contributors.

The venue

Find a venue within your area that is easy for everyone to get to, with wheelchair and pushchair accessibility. Health and safety should be a primary consideration. Think about the number of people the building can hold safely – a quick telephone call to potential venues will usually sort this out. Once you have decided on a venue and checked its availability, a site visit is essential. Take a number of

group members with you – several heads are better than one. If you're planning a large event, it may be worth asking the fire service to assist.

Draw up a checklist of tasks, including the following:

Have all the fire exits been checked? Are the toilets adequate? Are they sufficient for the number of people you anticipate? Are the toilets accessible for disabled people? Is there somewhere you can site baby-changing facilities? How and where will exhibitors unload and load? Is the venue child friendly and safe? Local police will need to be informed with regard to parking and parades. Police may supply an outrider for the front and rear of parades. Local transport companies will need to be informed out of courtesy if you intend to use the streets for parades.

Consider where people will park cars – is the area available at the venue adequate? Check the public liability insurance of the venue and your own organisation, and the liability insurance of contributors such as bouncy castle operators and quad bike providers. Check the insurance of any vehicles taking part in parades.Check with your local authority whether you need an entertainment licence. If you wish to sell beers, wines and spirits you will need to apply to your local magistrates' court for a temporary licence. Do this well in advance as licensing sessions do not occur every month. You will need to nominate someone as licensee.

Choosing a time and a date

Check that there are no other large events at this time, for example, school fêtes, church or temple events, or other celebrations in order to maximise attendance. Consider whether you will need to charge for admission.

Publicity

To whom do you want to advertise the fun day, where and how? Do you want to target local schools, community centres, shops, health/baby clinics or youth clubs? Think about the people you wish to draw to your event, and where they might meet. You'll have to consider whether you can afford to have invitations, flyers and posters designed and printed. If not, do you know anyone with a desk-top publishing package in their office or on their home computer? Proof read material very carefully – check dates, times and venue.

Themes

Many successful events have a theme. Some are organised as a result of a celebration such as Diwali, Christmas or a spring fayre. Themes can unify an event, break down barriers and provide a useful vehicle for organising the day. Popular themes include: a beach party, a teddy bears' picnic, an animal safari, space, cartoon characters, famous people, communication from around the world, the Olympics, colours, carnival, country themes, for example, the French Revolution or the Wild West.

Outside attractions

Consider engaging a small fair or rides for small children as crowd pullers. Other attractions could include: a coconut shy, 'throw the sponge', plate smashing, 'roll a coin', 'score a goal', sand/sawdust lucky dip, 'find the egg in the sand', 'pick a straw', a cake stall, a plant stall, face painting/face paint

tattoos, hair-braiding, tie-dying, plaster-casting, a potter's wheel, badge-making, enamelling, a fire engine, a police arena area, a local newspaper van, ice-creams, burger and hot dog van, baked potato wagon (NB: check who has the tender for your venue), a marquee, exhibitions from local voluntary groups or council organisations, stilt walkers, quad bikes, sumo wrestlers, gladiator challenge, 'it's a knockout', miniature railway, bungee crane – the list is endless! Check that people bringing things such as quad bikes have public liability insurance.

First aid station

Contact St John's Ambulance or another recognised organisation well in advance to arrange cover for your event. A First Aid station can also act as a relocation point for lost children/people.

PA system

A public address system is necessary for a large event (most DJs have these) and someone to announce coming attractions and keep the event moving. Would you like music? Will it be live or not?

Celebrity guests

Who will open your event? Will you have a VIP list? Will they need a presentation of flowers or wine? Assign someone to look after them.

Recording the day

Take lots of photos and/or video the day. You can hire a professional photographer or approach your local camera club or simply do it yourself. Approach your local newspaper and see if they will come along – free press coverage is good publicity. Plan a display in a public place for after the event.

Catering facilities

Most people buy refreshments at this type of event and catering can be a considerable money spinner. Home-made cakes, sweets and biscuits sell well as do tea, coffee and juice. You could consider having a bar, but this will have implications in terms of added responsibility for regulating behaviour and clearing away. You will need a temporary licence from your local magistrates' court. Outside caterers like burger bars and ice-cream vans are popular, especially if you are planning an all day event. You will need to check tender arrangements for your venue. Think about Asian and Caribbean caterers.

Clearing away, acknowledgements and debriefing

Areas used including streets and pavements will need to be cleared thoroughly and rubbish either taken to a disposal point or arrangements made at the venue.

It is worth writing an acknowledgement to all the people who have helped or participated, stall holders and exhibitors – you may need their help next year.

A debriefing session held soon after the day helps to wind things up. Write a short report for anyone who has given funds or gifts in kind – don't forget to thank all committee members for their help. Hopefully you'll all be able to pat each other on the back for a job well done!

Appendix 1: The Tipton Childminding Project Questionnaire

The Tipton Childminding Project

This questionnaire is not a test or an inspection. It is designed to help us gain an idea of the level of support currently available to childminders in the Tipton City Challenge area. The information we receive will assist us in identifying the specific needs of childminders and the children they look after.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

1. How long have you been registered as a childminder?

_____

2. How many children are you currently registered to look after?

_____

3. Are you a member of, or are you aware of, any of the organisations listed below?

a. The National Childminding Association _____

b. Pre-school Playgroups Association _____

c. Barnardos _____

d. Others _____

4. If you do not have contact with any of the above already, would you like more information on any of them?

_____

_____

5. Do you get the opportunity to meet with other childminders in your area on a formal or informal basis?

_____

_____

6. If the answer to the above is no, would you like the opportunity?

_____

_____

7. Do you have enough access to courses, training, discussion groups and written information in relation to your work?

8. If the answer to the above is no, would you like more details on any of the above?

9. Do you currently make use of any of the following facilities in your area in relation to your work?

   Toy libraries
   Play groups
   Book loans from libraries
   Support groups
   Self-help groups
   Coffee mornings
   Drop-ins

10. If you do not currently use any facilities, would you like more information on what is available for childminding in your area?

11. Are there are other comments you would like to make in respect to your work as a childminder and the level of support you have access to?

The Tipton Childminding Project would like to thank you for your time and assistance in completing this questionnaire

Appendix 2: The Tipton Childminding Project Questionnaire Analysis

Twelve childminders (out of fourteen) were visited by members of the Project on an individual basis. On average, one hour was spent with each childminder in their own homes.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was used as a guideline to stimulate discussion.

The aim of the questionnaire and the visits was to help us form an idea of the level of support available to childminders and to identify their needs.

The two childminders who were not interviewed have been difficult to contact. Rather than a cold visit, letters have been sent inviting them to contact us at their convenience.

Results

1. • Five minders had been registered for 6 years or over.
   • Four minders had been registered for 12 months or under.
   • Three minders had been registered for 3 years or under.

   (One childminder held sponsored status.)

2. • One childminder had been registered for 12 months but had not actively sought to childmind as she had been working part-time and was expecting a baby during the summer. She was interested in actively taking up childminding after the summer.
   • Four childminders were not looking after any children at the time of being interviewed. All these childminders felt that there was little interest in the service they were providing.
   • None of the childminders visited were working to their full capacity; all had vacancies. Between them they had eight full-time and four part-time placements.
   • Eleven childminders between them had 47 childcare places; therefore 35 vacancies full-time and 12 part-time.
   • The majority of children being looked after were in the 0–5 age bracket.
   • All the childminders interviewed and registered in the Tipton area were white. However, four of the 12 children were black, with two children of African-Caribbean origin and two children of Asian ethnic origin.

3. • Five childminders were not NCMA members.
   • Six were members but had very little awareness of the activities, aims and objectives of NCMA.
   • Two people remarked that they received the NCMA magazine but found it 'boring' and put it in the bin.
   • There was very little awareness of the Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA), Barnardos or other voluntary organisations, merely a recognition of the names.

4. • All the minders except one were very interested in receiving further information about the relevant organisations.

5. • Four childminders said they occasionally met other childminders on an informal basis, i.e., bumping into them at play groups, schools, etc.
   • Two lived on the same estate and so were able to act as 'back-up' minders for each other.
   • Six had no contact whatsoever with other minders and did not know where they lived.

6. • All the minders, without exception, said they would welcome the opportunity to meet with other minders on a regular basis.

7. • Of the childminders visited, only three said they had enough access to either courses, training, discussion groups or written information. All said they would like more details of the above.
   • Obstacles to access to the above included distances, frequently withdrawn courses due to low enrolment numbers, frequently inadequate notice of training given, and venues being difficult to reach.

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8.
- Childminders requested specific areas of training.
- Six childminders requested Under 8's First Aid training.
- Two childminders were very interested in an NNEB course and wanted further information.

9.
- Five childminders did not make use of facilities in their area at the time, for example, the Mobile Toy Library, play groups, support groups, etc.
- Seven childminders made use of either formal informal play groups.
- Five used book loan services from local libraries.

10.
- All said they would welcome more information on facilities specifically for childminders.
- There was a great deal of interest in the Save the Children Project Mobile Toy Library and Equipment Loan Service for specific use by childminders, and also in the drop-ins and support groups for childminders.
- Two expressed an interest in SCF providing multi-cultural books as part of the toy library service.

11.
- Some childminders felt that they received very little help in advertising their vacancies and therefore found it difficult to fill their places. There was some criticism of the list of childminders circulated by social services which was often out of date and did not give enough appropriate information. It was felt to be more appropriate if a list were sent out detailing the experience and qualifications of each childminder along with information about vacancies.
- Two minders specifically asked if our Project would be prepared to liaise with minders in the area and act as an intermediary information service between childminders and parents.
- Another function suggested for SCF would be to liaise with childminders to provide a more efficient back-up service for childminders as minders felt unable to negotiate time off because of a lack of alternative childcare.
- One childminder expressed concern that she should have been re-registering in September 1993 and was still waiting to do so in June 1994 when interviewed for the purpose of the questionnaire.
- Two childminders felt quite angry that they received little or no support from the local authority, specific criticism being that they saw their Day Care Officer once a year for inspection but had no contact otherwise.
- There was a need to address specific areas of training, for example First Aid.
- All childminders were very enthusiastic and showed real interest in Project.
- A general feeling of isolation and lack of support was apparent.

12. Most childminders felt undervalued resentful let down.

13. The quality of care observed was very high. Specialist knowledge level amongst the minders was good.

14. The long-term commitment of the minders was high. Many wanted to learn develop as professional child carers.

15. There was very little awareness of disability disability issues – this is possibly the result of little hands-on experience.

16. Racism was approached as an open issue and was discussed. The level of the minders' awareness was quite high.

17. The average fees charged by childminders were very low: in order to secure work, minders were having to charge even lower fees, often undercutting the fees of others.

18. Minders had been forced to turn some children away because of lack of equipment, for example, double buggies.

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Plan of action

- To set up an initial drop-in session, with play facilities for minded children, to give minders an opportunity to come together in a supportive atmosphere. To review this at the end of four months with a view to providing more if this proves productive.
- To look at the feasibility of setting up a Mobile Toy Library incorporating multi-cultural book loan service for the use of childminders in the Tipton City Challenge area.
- To set up an Equipment Loan Service consisting of double buggies, fireguards, car seats, stair gates, etc., specifically for the use of children in Tipton.
- To provide an easily accessible programme of training events appropriate to the needs of childminders in the Tipton area.
- To provide a database suitable to the needs of parents and childminders in the Tipton City Challenge area.

This report documents the work of the Tipton Childminding Project over four years between 1994 and 1998. It will be of interest to anyone wishing to focus on developing quality childminding in their area – local authority workers, the voluntary sector and childminding associations.

Save the Children is the UK's leading international children's charity, working to create a better future for children. In a world where children are denied basic human rights, we champion the right of all children to a happy, healthy and secure childhood. We put the reality of children's lives at the heart of everything we do. Together with children, we are helping to build a better world for present and future generations.

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